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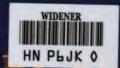
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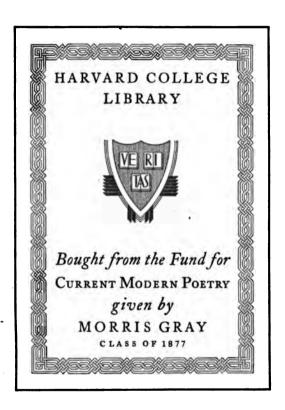
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OLIVER BRETT









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THE RECKONING A DRAMATIC POEM

A DRAMATIC POEM

OLIVER BRETT

LONDON: A. L. HUMPHREYS

187 PICCADILLY, W

1905

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EDITH.

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ACT I.

IN THE ROSE-GARDEN OF THE PALACE.

Enter the PRINCE.

PRINCE.

Am I so old? Have twenty radiant springs. And passion-laden summers passed away O'er my unconscious and neglectful head? Yes, I am old, who gaze with jealous eves At the eternal beauty of the world: The raiment of the trees remains unsoiled; The perfume of the flowers as delicate: The song the nightingale divinely sings To the fair moon's unchanging chastity. No time can kill or make less beautiful. Yes, I am old indeed, in wasted days, In thoughts unspoken and in deeds undone. The golden years, short-lived and wonderful, A foaming goblet of red wine I held Close to my lips yet did not dare to drink, Although each drop was fashioned by the gods. I stood aside upon the shores of doubt; I wandered on the shifting sands of thought: I dreamt strange dreams, half truth, half poetry,-And listened all in wonder and in fear

To the wild beating of my drunken heart. I stood upon the brink of passion's sea. And let the laughing ripples kiss my feet In invitation vain and musical. Yet did not dare to dive in search of love.-To seek the pearl of human happiness. And yet I am not old: there still is time: O gods, feel ye a tenderness for love:-Send me a girl,—a little thing that I Can take within my arms and call my own: A tender girl upon whose crimson lips To place my own in silence mystical; Whose body, white and innocent and pure, I may enclose within my wild embrace. Send me a girl all beautiful and young. Whose heart may be the jewel of my life.

[Sees LADY EDITH approaching: Behold, an answer to my prayer, ye gods:— Where Venus walks, a goddess upon earth.

Enter LADY EDITH.

RDITH.

Forgive me, Sir, for this intrusion made By accident upon your solitude. My erring footsteps to the garden came To see the kisses of the sunlight fall Upon the fading petals of the rose.

PRINCE.

Forgiveness of a fault so gently sweet

Makes pardon half a crime: the poet's heart

That seeks for beauty 'mid the summer flowers Needs but to meet you walking in the sun, To make his dream of Paradise complete.

EDITH.

Before the majesty of such a day We must believe that all the world is fair, And see the silver linings of the clouds.

PRINCE.

Ah yes, the world is not itself to-day; Some magic wand bewitches it indeed: Or am I closed in some enchanted sleep, Where fond imagination will create The thing the heart in waking must desire? Are you a dream? a wonderful princess, With whom I've wandered into fairy-land?

RDITH.

I am no dream, and no princess, alas; No halo of romance surrounds my head:— A little girl who wanders to the court To fill a place her mother dignified, To follow in her footsteps if she can,— The youngest maid-of-honour to the Queen.

PRINCE.

The blossom's ever fairer than the flower:—
And I must think this blossom newly blown:
For I have watched my mother's garden bloom,
Yet never seen a rose so delicate:

How fortunate the Queen whose idle days Such sweet-voiced angels deign to consecrate.

EDITH.

Your mother: ah, my lord, forgive, I pray: Believe me guiltless of discourtesy: I had no thought when I half turned aside To play with words, to turn an idle phrase, That I had chanced upon the Prince himself.

PRINCE.

The Prince: what misery is written down
Within six letters of that little word:
I feel and think the same as other men:
With all the ease and lightness of a slave,
My eyes in pleasure dwell upon a maid,
And all my heart reverberates with love:
The anger springs unbidden in my soul:
I find it just as difficult to choose
The narrow path that leads to what is right:
The mists of doubt surround me, and the truth
Still veils in sorrow her elusive face:
'Tis just as hard for prince or page to steal
The wandering fire about the brows of fame.

RDITH.

My lord, you are the mirror of the world,
In which all men must gaze to see themselves,
Of what they are and what they ought to be:
Your own nobility creates you first:
You guard the type of honour in yourself.

PRINCE.

The glass they gaze upon is dark: my mind Was taught to reason with itself, and make A plain and certain road to happiness:-But still each thought that inspiration brings Takes me no nearer to the goal of life. I have indeed the claim refinement gives .-The culture of my birth, the sensual love Of all and everything that's beautiful: The delicate perception of the good That makes a man the prince of other men:-And vet I have not justified my life: No single creature in the world would be One jot less happy if I ceased to live: If I were hanged in agony at dawn, No voice would ory to save me from my death, For some sweet thing that I had done for them.

RDITH.

Such is your mood,—the noble discontent
Of minds too eager to be satisfied.
For who is judge of all the good he does?—
A single word that's spoken in the dark,
A little act of kindness here or there,
May be of higher value than you dream.

PRINCE.

No little service suits my jealous soul:

I dream of love, I ruminate on fame:

For only they can satisfy my heart,

And fill the boundless ocean of unrest.

For I have learnt to understand their price, And now no meaner joy can bring to me That exultation of a thing achieved, Which is the glory of accomplishment.

EDITH.

My lord, for such as you the rose of love Grows waiting to be plucked, and Fame herself Entwined her arms around you at your birth: The gods have favoured you, and men applaud Each word you say because the words are yours.

PRINCE.

My aspiration needs no flattery: It is not idle praise that I desire: My critic mind will not deceive itself: I know the true from false, and false from true: I know that nought I've done can weigh within The finer scales of immortality: I know that if my talent could create Some noble thing to beautify the world, That I the first should recognise the gold, And hold it in my hands and call it good. But no, I make no mark upon the sand So large but that the sea can wash it out: The castles that I build are made of air. A fantasy of dreams that none can see, Save I, who build them only to destroy. The world is full of sorrow and of pain: So many hearts are bleeding in the night, That need the touch of sympathy to heal;

So many ways are dark, and ask in vain
For some faint glimmer of the light of truth;
And yet I stand and shiver on the brink,
And know not on which side to venture forth
To win my spurs upon the battle-field.
The whisper of philosophy is lost,
The lisp of poetry is drowned within
The noise and murmur of the weary world:
Impatience and disgust have maddened me,
Until I've sworn that, if I've failed to reap
Their futile admiration, I will earn
Their foolish wonder for a wanton deed:
The dark and dangerous echo of despair.

EDITH.

What use to batter on the doors of life?—
To kick against the pricks that circle it?
What use to play Prometheus on the rock,
Until you know the secret of the fire?
The world hears not the eagle as it dies:
It would not hear the breaking of your heart:
It would not care, nor pause upon its way:—
Or but to mark your madness and to laugh.
For you have done no deed to further it,
Nor set a golden crown upon your head.

PRINCE.

The world shall one day listen when I speak: I feel it in my heart: I know it true:—
And men shall tell their children that I came,
To teach the need of happiness on earth.

EDITH.

My lord, forgive me, but the mind creates
All that is good and pure upon the earth:
Subdue your heart, and fashion it to thought;—
For now the dust of passion in your eyes,
The breathless beating of your heart, must hide
The lights that shine upon the hills of truth.

PRINCE.

Ah yes, my heart will dominate my brain:
And yet this heart that eats into my soul,
That spreads its arms abroad in wild embrace,
And feels the pulses of the moving world,—
Has searched in vain upon the shores of life,
And wandered desolate through stormy years,
To find a thing to love,—to touch the chord
Of soothing music in another's heart,
Which is the note of sympathy and love.
Yet all in vain: I never gazed entranced
Within the tender depths of any eyes,
Wherein I read the message of my dreams:
No flash of lightning glorifies my world,
When star meets star in space and both are one.

RDITH.

Methinks, my lord, the path is difficult For such a one as you to meet success. The ways of Love are gentle, and his heart Desires the wine of happiness to drink. For Love is still a child, with open eyes, Who wanders in the garden of romance:

His kisses are as tender as the wind: His wings as soft as interwoven silk:— And, as he lingers in the summer air, He plucks the flowers of passion at his side. Yes, Love is still a dream of olden days: He dwells in silence and simplicity: He smiles in pensive thought upon the world, In innocence attuned to coquetry. But you, my lord, are complex and obscure: You play with thought and pander to a jest: You laugh with scorn and weep in agony: You take a pleasure in your own disgust: The charm of cynic words, the poet's love Of subtle paradox, surround your soul: You love the tempest you yourself create, And make a problem of your lightest deed. So all is sad and serious, and the god,— The little god of Love avoids you still. And yet, my lord, I thank you for myself, For privilege of speech with you this day: Your words have filled my mind with interest, And, in the twisting mazes of your thought, I'd half forgot my message to the Queen.

PRINCE.

Ah, must you go, Princess, before the sun Has set in golden glory 'neath the hills?

EDITH.

Farewell, my lord, methinks the day will come, In spite of all the knowledge of your years,

In spite of dim philosophy, and all The cultivation that refinement gives, When Love will enter to your bleeding heart, And leave you simple as a little child.

PRINCE.

That day will leave me monarch of the earth: However high I soar, however low I stoop my head into the dust, to find That priceless pearl, I'll place it on my brow, And wear it in defiance of the world.

RDITH.

My lord, you're wise enough to be a fool, And who am I to bid that wisdom cease, Which bears such tender folly as its child?

PRINCE.

Farewell; I wait among the roses here, To watch the gentle pathway of the moon.

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

ON THE TERRACE OF THE PALACE.

Enter the PRINCE and LADY EDITH.

PRINCE.

Come, let us wander 'neath the silent stars, And rest upon the bosom of the night.

EDITH.

There is a spirit in the air, my lord,
That turns my soul to gentleness and ease:
Some breath of summer flowers, some lazy rose,
Forgetful of the hour, that all unseen
Sheds its scent-laden sweetness on the earth
In passionate delight. Ah, fair indeed
The flower that blooms in silence and so dies.

PRINCE.

I hear the voices of the darkness call Their magic harmony around my heart: My spirit steals serenity and calm, Soothed by the soft-toned laughter of the trees, Till, in a dream of song, I understand The nightingale's immortal melody.

EDITH.

The moon sails on upon her cloudless course: The night is fair enough for ecstasy: So each of us is tempted to romance,— And I am moved by silence, you by song.

PRINCE.

Which marks the difference that must divide Two creatures such as you and I, whose souls Dwell in two worlds, 'twixt which the boundless sea Flows deep in wild estranging bitterness.

RDITH.

Are then our minds divergent for all time?—
And is this then the parting of the ways?
And does the path you choose lead straight and wide
Into the trackless deserts of the North,
While mine meanders amid shady trees,
By purling streams and valleys bountiful,
Towards the languid gardens of the South?

PRINCE.

Ah yes, it must be so: like day and night, Like good and bad, one world, one heart indeed Cannot contain two things so different.

EDITH.

And yet you're wrong: perhaps the silver moon Contrasts her beauty with the golden sun, Not dreaming that her very light is his: It may be that my mind in minor key Reflects the nobler music of your own.

PRINCE.

It may be you were sent to tune my life,-To soften all the discords and create The sweetness of a twin-stringed instrument. Ah yes, divinity attends your ways: Before you came to me a bleak despair Filled all my soul with bitterness and hate; My youth was dving at my feet, and life Held nothing that was beautiful and good; The depths of knowledge and the hearts of men Held nothing worthy to be loved or sought; And all my passion wasted like a stream That flows into a sea of discontent. Where was the sweet reward of enterprise. That was not lost in sorrow and unrest?-I sought in vain for happiness, and found It was the echo of an empty dream. And then, behold you came to me, and all ... My hell became a paradise again: My bitter sea became a sapphire lake, O'er which with moon-lit sails of fantasy I moved with all the motion of delight: My thoughts lay silently upon my mind, Like banks of cloud that rest upon the sky: My words of anger melted into tears. And seemed the whisper of the summer rain. I saw again the beauty of the world. Which is the smile upon the face of God. The magic of your wand had touched my life, And in a moment turned it into gold. Ah, since the gods have sent me such a pearl,

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Must I not always wear it on my heart? Since balm itself is growing at my feet, Must I not crush the perfume in my hands? My child, your gentle charm, your innocence, The beauty of your eyes, your tender mouth, The vast, eternal pity of your heart, Have filled my soul with overwhelming love. I love you, ah I love you, with a love The power of language fails me to express.

EDITH.

My Prince, I've loved you since the day we met Among the roses of the later Spring:—
That very day I rendered up my heart,
In hope that you would some day care for it.
And now behold, my life is made complete:—
To-day, at last, you offer me your own.

PRINCE.

Princess, the name I called you from the first,—
Princess you are, and empress of my life:
I offer you my heart, yet fear, alas,
The gift I offer you is no return
For all the maiden love you give to me.
Time-worn and scarred with all the wounds of life,
I soar around the mountains of unrest:
The cruel eagle mates not with the dove:
I shall disturb the peace within your breast:
I am the stone that mars and desecrates
The crystal surface of a placid stream;—
You are a rose whose scented petals muse

On summer skies and pleasure-laden hours, And I the storm that throws it in the dust. Ah no, I cannot ask you to be mine: I am the prince of sorrow and of tears: I can but hurt your little heart, and kill The calm of happiness that fills your eyes,—The pretty smile that lingers on your lips.

RDITH.

Think you a girl but cares for gentleness,
The thing she finds most often in herself?
Ah, since we know not why we dare to love,
We do not ask the qualities and faults
Of those whose destiny is linked with ours.
My only care in life, my only hope,
Is both to share your sorrow and your joy.
Then take my heart, and tear it in your hands:—
And we will ride the storm-cloud and destroy
Our own sweet lives together in delight,—
For just a doubt we could not hope to solve,
For just a thought that no man could believe,
For just a dream too splendid to be true.

PRINCR.

And yet I could not pluck a tender flower, That blows so sweetly in the summer air.

EDITH.

The flower desires no better fate indeed Than to be worn in silence at your heart: Affection's warmth shall nourish it, and all The charm of love shall succour it like dew.

The dangers that you fear are nought to me:—
Because I love you now for evermore,
All else but love is nothing in my eyes,
And I will dare whatever sorrow comes.
Upon the altar of your love I place
The sixteen summers of my little life:
Do with them what you will: I start afresh:
I throw my young ambitions and my hopes,
My fragments of belief, my love of good,
Away with all my past into the dust:
Such phantoms as content, such dreams as heaven,
Such wandering fires as human happiness,
Are phrases coined for fools to juggle with:
I know them not: I trust to love alone,—
For only love can make a woman brave.

PRINCE.

Dear heart, your courage sparkles in your eyes, And I would trust you with my life indeed:

If you are stedfast to the word of love,
I care not for the rest;—no single thing
In heaven or earth can tear me from your arms. Yet swear, that whatsoever chance may fall,
You never for one instant will regret
The hour we met, the day I crossed your path:
That never in the dim and distant years
You'll turn your misty eyes upon the world,
And, with light melancholy words, recall
The misery I brought upon your life,
And curse the cruel fate that turned my feet
Across the pleasant meadows of your youth.

EDITH.

I swear I never could forget to-day:
Two hours of perfect ecstasy suffice
To make a memory for evermore.
Ah no, do what you will: I care not now:
Take all my virgin heart has yet to give,
And let me fall at dawn into the dust,
I still have had my moment of delight,
I still shall bless the hand that injures me,
I still shall love the ruler of my heart.

PRINCE.

Turn to the moon, my darling,—let your face Be lit by her with silver loveliness:

Let her caress your hair, whose raven folds Move in the shadows of encircling night:
Ah, perfect is the beauty of a girl:
The perfume of your maiden innocence
Surrounds you like a cloud: no pictured saint
Could be more sacred in simplicity:
Serene and chaste, your alabaster brows
Await the crown of lilies they deserve:
Like golden dreams in gardens beautiful,
The rhythmic movement of your body goes:
O sweet embodiment of grace, I love
The plaintive music of your idle feet.

RDITH.

No music in the world can touch my heart, But just the words you whisper in my ears.

PRINCE.

Sweet image of the jealous world's desire. I fear to place my hand upon your arm; Of what has God produced so fair a work?— Of porcelain too delicate to touch, An ornament we gaze upon in fear. Lest just a breath might shatter it in twain,— That fashioned out of dust might fade away. And merge into the molten universe. Ah, let me take your hand and let us go Across the borders of the world away. And wander by strange lands and lazy seas: Let us intwine ourselves in our delight. And, lost in dreams upon a fairy boat. Set silver sails and float into the west:-Just you and I, my child, just you and I, The lover and his sweetheart as of old.

EDITH.

How sweet to leave the tired and dusty world Wrapt in the failure of its hope of good, And dwell where jealousy cannot destroy The fragile fabric of our dream of love. To find a garden where the foot of man Has ne'er defiled the perfume of the rose: Some fair forgotten island of the seas, Where toil is not, and sorrow has no place, Where custom holds no mockery of sway, And where untrammelled in our hearts we find The old primeval beauty of desire.

PRINCE.

How sweet to dwell in solitude with you;—
No matter where, my queen, your kingdom lies;
Like stars your eyes should twinkle in my sky;
Like clouds your hair should float around the night,
While all the sun should linger in your smile:
And I will count the hours of life depart
By just your rhythmic breathing as it flows.

RDITH.

Misfortune dwells about the feet of love, And fate itself is jealous of delight: For you and I were born in luxury. And fed with milk and honey as we grew; Our minds weré fashioned into graceful thought. And all the elegance refinement gives Sheds lustre on our lives; the gentle ways And perfect manners of the highly born Are ours by right; --- so intellect has taught Our tender hearts to join and understand The subtle words love whispers in our ears. And yet the bars of our nobility Lie heavily around us night and day: They clog the wheels of pleasure, and forbid Our hearts to rule the kingdom of our lives. Ah, if we were but poor and yet could feel As now the strength, the depth of cultured love. And all the wonder of its golden dream, How sweet the liberty to pass away Unnoticed in the mass of other lives:

To dwell in lazy silence by the sea;
To wander gently in the busy street
With all the ease and charm of poverty:
To know no other duty but to live,
No other hope but love, no end but death:
Ah, joy to feel that if we love or die,
No soul can care, or wonder, or despise.

PRINCE

Like stars we cannot hide from vulgar eyes:
Both sage and clown can gaze at us, and break
Their cynic scorn on our defenceless heads:
Morality can point, and wisdom bring
Some reason cold, some ancient argument,
To batter down the few who disobey
The sacred law society has made.
Yet let them shake their heads and stare, and show
That supercilious eyebrows disapprove,
Convention cannot soil nor custom kill
The love that makes the world our myrmidon.

EDITH.

And yet I fear the verdict of that world;
You are the Prince, the heir of majesty,
The hope on which the generations gaze;
You must do right: you cannot choose your path:—
For jealous eyes must guard your erring feet,
And careful hands preserve your dignity.
While I am still a child to be coerced,
Whose wilful ways, precocious impudence,

Deserve the strict compulsion of a school: And they will chide me to submit because I dared to raise my eyes upon the throne— I dared to love the man I should obey.

PRINCE.

Fear not to love me since I am a man—
A man whose heart is master of himself,
A man who could not choose but worship you.
And yet I am the Prince and none can say,
If I am some day King, that you, Princess,
Would not fulfil the honour of a Queen,
With all the sweet nobility of youth.
I am the Prince;—I take you for my bride,
And none shall dare to say me nay; my word
Is law to all;—and when I say I love
The world must listen,—for my heart is set
For evermore upon a single girl.

EDITH.

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Alas, the world is hard; it hates romance;
And all the charm and sweetness of desire.
The poet's burning soul, the lover's heart
Are crushed and killed, because they dare to show
The bitterness of life to other men,
Who have not found the pearls upon the sand.
Yet fight, my Prince,—fight bravely to the last,
And I will stand beside you, and defend
Your cause and mine, dear heart, as well I may:
And yet, whatever Fate may bring, my love

Will still remain unchanging as the sea:
My heart is yours as stedfast as the hills:—
And sea and land must pass to dust away,
Before I break the love-word of my soul.

PRINCE.

The words like music wander from your lips,
And sink into my heart to find their rest.

Dear, childish lips, how tender is the curve
Of Cupid's bow; how sweet the fleeting smile
That wanders like a ghost and then is gone;
How passionate the rose of girlhood blooms;
How crimson is the flower, whose perfume glides
Like summer through the air;—ah, love indeed
Must change from word to deed to pass your lips.
Can you forgive the slander of a kiss?
Profanity indeed: your virgin mouth
Must pale before the sacrilege of love;
I am a man who rises with the dawn,
To make a pathway in untrodden snow.

EDITH.

My heart beats, and my will is not my own:

Delight and wonder fill me, and I feel

How boundless is the love which fills my heart.

PRINCE.

There is no moment that is more divine;
There is no gem more priceless or more rare;
Love holds no rite more sacred than a kiss.

BDITH.

Good-night, my Prince: I thank you from my heart: I am as proud, as happy as a queen.

PRINCE.

Good-night, dear heart: this moment cannot die: The memory of joy so wonderful Illuminates our lives for evermore.

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

LADY EDITH'S SITTING-ROOM.

LADY EDITH discovered.

RDITH.

How strange is love, how marvellously sweet: Like some mysterious magic of the East, It finds its secret way into the heart: Like fire it circles madly in the veins, And in an instant turns the world to gold. An innocent and wayward child, I moved Along the cloistered corridors of youth: The flowers, whose fragrance breathed simplicity. I idly plucked and threw them on the ground: I played with foolish things and made pretence That deep emotions glorified my soul: I looked on life behind the garden wall, And thought the tributary stream that ran Its lazy course in silence to the sea, To be the mighty river of the world,— And that the few who dwelt upon its banks Contained within their minds the buried thought And knowledge of a thousand centuries,— Within their hearts the attributes of love. And all the cherished symbols of romance. And so through childhood's unforgotten years,

I dreamed of things I could not understand. Then came a day on which forbidden fruit Fell from the tree of knowledge to my feet: My eyes were opened and I understood How mean and trivial were the joys I held So priceless and divine; how fame itself, And all ambition's fretful company Hold no reward but sorrow and unrest; How virtue is a fraud, and chastity The catch-word of a disappointed heart; And how the frame-work of society.-The love of good, the punishment of bad, The dim, faint hope of immortality, The gods of use and custom, the desire That duty feels and conscience will dictate,-Are words to catch the fool, the frozen heart That lives and dies, but has not learnt to feel. Ah love, young love, the wonder of the world; Youth's dream, the hope of girlhood, the despair That withers age to cynical dislike; The mystery that since the dawn of time Remains insoluble: for none can tell The way that Love will wing his silent flight; His wanton eyes inscrutable and dark Will turn their burning gaze upon the poor In some low hovel redolent of vice. And leave untouched the palace of a king; His laughter echoes gladly through the night; He brings the real and splendid happiness; And e'en the sorrow in his heart is tinged With all the varied colours of romance.

The rich must lose their vacant vanity:

The poor must lose their misery and toil:—

For all are equal, when the touch of love

Destroys the cruel kingdom of the mind,

And leaves the heart the ruler of the world.

Love, Love, for ever beautiful and pure,—

I kneel a life-long suppliant at your throne.

[Enter the PRINCE.

Alas, why come you here to-night? Why risk Long happy years of love, to snatch an hour, A foolish hour that dies e'er it is born?

PRINCE.

Because I look into the future, child,
And see no happiness for you and me:
The hills of time are hidden in the clouds,
But in the valley here the sun is fair:
I snatch the present hour because I can:
Our love is placed upon a doubtful chance,—
Relentless Fate may leave us desolate:
Then let us steal what joy is given us:
No coward fear shall lessen our delight,
And let to-morrow bring whate'er it may.

RDITH.

I do not tremble at the scowl of Fate:
No clouds of shame, no mists of doubt assail
The peaceful calm that lies around my soul:
No danger lives so dark, so difficult
The stedfast power of love cannot destroy;
For Death itself, which men call terrible.

Is sweet to me as is the balm of sleep: To die to-night enclosed within your arms, Would be the soft enchantment of caress. But yet be patient, be discreet—who knows We may obtain the thing that we desire.

PRINCE.

My rebel heart outruns me in the race: Like one who standing on the shifting sand, In vain forbids the sea to kiss his feet, I cannot curb the ardour of my love.

EDITH.

I see no reason in your father's words;
I see no cause that he should disapprove
So utterly—without a thought, a hope
Of soft persuasion or of compromise;
I cannot see the working of his mind,
Nor feel the deep concern within his heart.
Some word of protest for our thoughtless youth,
Some wish for the delay which fathers love,
Some vague surprise you should have made your choice
Below the usual order of a queen—
I'd thought to meet; but kindly is the King,
And I believed would give us our desire.
But no, with strange refusal he supplies
The knife which cuts the blossom of our love.

PRINCE.

His reason is his jealousy: too long Has youth endured the thraldom of the old: How dare they stand upon a snow-capt hill,

And carp at all the sunshine of the South? Experience is cold and memory Paints an unfaithful picture of the past: The wine of life runs sluggish in their veins: The glory of the dawn has died away: The story of their youth is closed and done: The girls they loved, the deeds they did, are names, Just empty names that echo in their ears; And all the passion that they felt but seems A sin to be forgotten, not excused. How dare they curb the ardour of our blood? How dare they mark the pathways of our lives? How dare they judge our conduct, and appoint Themselves the guardians of our inmost souls? For where my love has fallen it will grow::: And where my heart enjoins me I shall love:---And not the hand of God Himself can kill A love so stedfast and so true as mine. The more the world forbids me to desire. The stronger burns the passion in my heart.

EDITH.

Am I so mean that I deserve their scorn?

Am I so poor and worthless that the thought

Of such a bride as I should be absurd?

Am I so young that no one can believe

The failure of my love would break my heart?

Is it then all for nothing that my days

Are filled with toil for knowledge and for good?—

That all my years of childhood I have tried

To bring to flower the garden of my mind,

To make my heart as tender as a rose?

Does it not count that I have decked with care
The little beauty that God gave to me
For other's pleasure?—that my anxious thought
Has been with gentle manners to create
The utmost culture that refinement gives?
Is this of no account, that I am thrown
So easily aside?

PRINCE.

'Fore God, dear heart,
You walk an angel here upon the earth:—
The perfect image of the good and true.

EDITH.

I do not claim perfection: I am made In the same cast as other women are: I too am weak when passion fills my heart: My mind thinks not of reason or of time: I find no refuge in belief: I hold No rope of self-control: I have no thought Of honour or of dim morality; And truth itself is easily foregone:-Such things to women are a fantasy,— For only love is real in their lives: They cannot treat it as a jest, to them It is their life's one reason and excuse-The joy a girl who broods on future days Half feels within her heart in ecstasy: The pain a woman musing on the past Still loves to fondle in a half delight:

It is the key-note of a woman's soul—
The dream, the hope, the memory of life.
And I am just a woman like the rest:
I feel the agony of hope deferred;
I feel the sorrow when my heart is torn,
I cling with courage born of misery
To little things that I have learnt to love.

PRINCE.

You know the staid and iron-hearted man, Who makes the law himself and worships it, And, at the altar of his dream of good, Can sacrifice with calm and cold content The blood of struggling millions who have erred: Who draws with steady hand across the world The thin, straight line of duty, and commands That be the man a poet or a fool, A dreamer or a criminal who dares To walk without the borders, he shall die. To such a man, whose god is abstract right, Who feels no passion burning in himself, No pity for the sins of other men Because the tempter knocks not at his door-The heart that dares to leave the beaten track To stray among the flowers, and give its love To one whom custom bars eternally, Must be destroyed for ever and at once.

EDITH.

Is then the self-styled justice of mankind The sword the many use against the few?

PRINCE.

The laws and customs of the world are made To keep the mass of dullards in their place-To crush the intellect that strives to reach The higher planes of truth and poetry-The hidden realms of passion and desire. The laws are part and parcel with the past: The children of authority, they form The prison walls that bind our simple lives Within the mean of mediocrity. For truth is dangerous: it dwells in thought. Is bred upon an ocean of unrest; Its ways are fraught with mystery and doubt; It clings to vice and sleeps in wickedness; And worse than all where'er its face is seen It overturns the order of the world. And so the wise, who seek but for the truth, The poet and the dreamer are consumed By the immortal fire that they create. Such is the penalty of those who feel The genius of their own divinity. Then how in saner moments could we dream The world could ever learn to tolerate The burning passion of eternal love? Whose qualities are beauty and desire— Whose rippling laughter, light and insolent, Can bring a sense of failure to the great, A sense of empty virtue to the good. The kiss that lingers gently on his lips Cares not for scorn and anger, for he knows How envy turns to poison in the heart.

All scorn a jewel that they ne'er possess:
All hate a pleasure that they ne'er enjoy:

And men deny to others in their pain
Their right divine of happiness on earth.

EDITH.

And yet the few who suffer for their dreams Have the delight of knowledge for reward. For who is not content to die in pain, If with his dying lips he can proclaim A truth to soften lives that are not born? Who would not live in poverty and need. If in his haggard mind he could possess A thought to move a century to tears, And bring a gentler influence to the world? For such as those have never lived in vain: And such as we have never loved in vain. The storm is round us now: the day is dark. And diverse interests clash around our heads: But still in after years, when all are dead,-When words and deeds are hidden in the mist Which kindly time has placed around the past, And only passion with its charm survives— The world will read, as it has ever done. The story of true love with calm delight, Will feel its heart grow tender, and the tears Rise up in pity for the sorrowful;-Will let the lesson sink into its soul. And use again what power it may possess To earn the crown of an undying love.

PRINCE.

We will be true, we must be true to love: The world may do its worst, we still are tied By the eternal oath of constancy.

EDITH.

Suppose the King continues to refuse,
Suppose that I can never be your bride,
Suppose they try to separate our lives,
Yet still our sorrow is a half delight:
For we have loved, and e'en our misery
Is happier than the lives of those who dwell
Beneath the dull grey wings of commonplace.
Our hearts can whisper in the silent night
Of all the mystery that shrouds our love;
And we can understand the radiant joy
That runs like wine through all the veins of life.

PRINCE.

I hold a secret hidden in my heart
Too wonderful to speak of or describe:
It is my own creation and idea,
And no man has a share or part in it:
Its glory turns all pain to happiness:
Its charm surrounds me like a silver cloud:
And still whatever chances in my life,
Whatever sorrow or misfortune falls,
I still can turn for solace to myself—
Forgetting all in wonder and delight
Of this most secret thing that I possess.

EDITH.

Beloved, say what secret is so fair?

PRINCE.

My love for you:—that like a priceless pear! Shines with calm light and spotless purity Within the ocean depths of my still heart: Above, the shricking fragments of the storm Burst in wild spray upon the iron rocks; The white foam dances in the scudding breeze, And angry are the movements of the waves: But down within the temple of the deep, A sacred silence consecrates the true, And Love is king, majestic and serene.

EDITH.

What is this hour that I may mark it red
Within the record of my youthful years?
To-night the moon is shining through the clouds,
And all the pathway of our love is clear.
How can we drain our cup of happiness,
Till not a drop is left within the cup?
How can we force from out a single hour
The long, long pleasure of a thousand years?
O that to-night could never cease to be,
But still be with us when to-morrow comes,
Like some fantastic story in a dream.
O if I could but sleep, yet understand
And feel the glory in my soul as now,
I should not wish to wake till I was dead.
Alas, the sweetest moments in our lives

Are more ephemeral than is the rose:
Like Psyche I must cling to what I love,
Because at dawn my Eros flies away.
The jealous gods will not allow two hearts
To be too happy here upon the earth.

PRINCE.

How sweet to feel your presence near to me; How sweet to hear the music of your words: O'er all you do and say a charm pervades, Which fills me with delight: O pretty child, How tender is your childhood; how divine The wonder in your eyes; how soft the bloom That flushes like the dawn upon your cheek: Are you a woman yet, and can you feel Her stronger passions racing in your blood?

EDITH.

My heart is older than my years—it feels
Those sacred truths of which we dare not speak:
Ah, tell me that you love me once again:
Tell me a thousand times within an hour:—
Because my instinct tells me that to-night
Will crown our highest pinnacle of love,
And that to-morrow you will go away,
And leave me only memory or death.
Ah, for I love you, dearest, but the word
Can ne'er fulfil a thought so infinite:
I love you till I breathe in agony:
I love you till I tremble with delight:
I love you till my heart in ecstasy

Bursts like a flower to blossom in the sun:
Believe, the casket of my love contains
The subtle charm of overwhelming life,
The mystic silence of fantastic death,
The dreams of madness and the joy of sin,
The purity of happiness, and all
The thousand passions of the human heart;
My body and my soul unite to steal
Within the haven of your outstretched arms.

PRINCE.

So will I take you in my arms, dear heart:

I love to smooth the satin of your hair—
To taste its perfume sweetly delicate,
Like tangled meadow-sweet in woods of pine:
I love to let my fingers idly fall
Around the dainty whiteness of your throat:
I love to stoop in mystic reverence,
And place my lips in silence on your brow:
I love to kiss your eyelids and your eyes:
I love, ah most of all, to kiss your lips.

EDITH.

Ah, God, I feel the faintness of a dream.

PRINCE.

How perfect you are made; how beautiful
The form and fashion of your figure lies:
An easy lightness floats about the robes
That decorate your shoulders and caress
Your lithe young limbs: Ah, let me place my head

Upon the sacred precinct of your heart: Thus let me rest and hear in silence sweet The quiet breathing of your angel breast.

RDITH.

It beats so loudly that you could not sleep: It beats for you: it beats for utter love.

PRINCE.

And yet it beats quite softly, for the sound Fades into silence like a smothered cry:

It beats so softly that my eager ears
Catch but faint music like a distant bell:
Ah love, this chime of bells shall crown my home,
Shall draw me to its side where'er I be:
Shall be the axis of my moving life,
The inspiration of my inmost dreams.

EDITH.

I hold you now: I feel your boundless love Is all for me: I hold your heart at last.

PRINCE.

I love you more than all things in the world: I love you more than I can love myself.

EDITH.

With these words let it end:—for end it must, This night of new, mysterious delight.

Alas, that any hour so redolent of charm

Should be so fleeting—for the dawn of love
Is but the golden glory of an hour.

So let us part, my love, and thank the gods

For all the wealth of pleasure we possessed: Yes, let us part in sorrow for the death Of moments far too beautiful to live. Good-night, my dearest: kiss me once again, That I may hold forever in my heart The sacred memory of that embrace.

PRINCE.

Good-night, dear child of beauty and of love:
May all the little angels guard your bed
From fear, from danger, from unrest, and keep
God's fairest daughter safely through the night:
And may your soft and gentle sleep remain
Unbroken, and your scattered dreams be sweet.
Ah, through a labyrinth of drowsy thoughts,
May my faint image wander like a thread—
The image of a man whose wayward heart
Has found a peaceful haven in your breast.

CURTAIN.

with the terminal of the first state.

ACT IV.

THE KING'S ROOM.

(The King and the Prince discovered.)

PRINCE.

Is then this broad and mediocre farce,
This old paternal comedy again
To drag its weary length across the stage?
Are you a king, am I a prince, that thus
Like knaves who have no thought above their gold,
We fight and wrangle over sacred things,
With all the vulgar bickering of fools?
Must it be so? Must you again to-night,
Though stale and profitless the argument,
Essay with saws of wisdom and restraint
To force my heart to cut and tear away
The ties which bind it to the girl I love?

KING.

Your anger is too needless to resent:
Small wonder if at times I should forget,
Amid the wayward twistings of your mind,
And all the hasty ignorance of youth,
You are not still the boy you used to be.
Yet, when I ask you to apply your thought
To such advice as I may give to you,

I do not speak as father to his son:
I do not threaten nor do I command—
I only wish to give your youthful mind
The larger benefit of what I know—
Of what the world miscalls experience,
Which is the sorrow of my longer life.
Can you suppose 'tis any joy to me
To be the arbiter of other's fate?
Can you suppose a secret pleasure lies
In duty's paths, in honour's cold decrees?
And that 'tis easy for a father's heart
To be the breaker of his children's dreams?
Your part is lighter than the one I bear:
I'd rather break my heart a thousand times
Than bring a moment's pain to those I love.

PRINCE.

You put me in the wrong: you must forgive
The bitter thoughts that surge around my soul:
The wild impatience of delay, the hate
Of all the narrow customs and control
That lie about the purlieus of a court
Rise up and drown the reason of my mind.

KING.

Alas, so easily is reason drowned:
The flashing of brown eyes in mockery,
The sensual passion in a summer night,
Some dim, sweet touch of sympathy, and lo
The innocence of boyhood can mistake
The charm of sentiment for love itself.

Are you so sure that what you feel to-night. Is the eternal reverence of love—
The sober friendship for another's soul,
Which Time itself is powerless to destroy:
And not the phantom of a heated dream—
A midsummer romance that fades away
When lilies droop their heads and roses die?

PRINCE.

I cannot speak with ease of what I feel:
I have no eloquence to plead my cause:
And yet when love, the real immortal love,
Dawns in the beating heart of man, he knows,
He cannot choose but know and recognise
A thing so strange, so wonderful, so sweet;
A thing which no man ever could explain;
A thing which no man ever could mistake.

KING.

Yes, such is love: inscrutable and strange,
No reason dwells in his tempestuous heart:—

- And so men love the things that they despise;
They worship wickedness, and, doubly mad,
See fascination in a tiger's grace,
Think arrogance is pride, and bitterness
The cultured wit that hides a gentle heart;
And so the world has said that Love is blind.
What know you of this girl that in an hour
Has left you stranded on the shores of life?
Just what you see, her beauty and her youth,
And all the passion that the flattery

Of your wild adoration has aroused Within her innocent and virgin heart. What can she know of such a sin as love? An ignorant and wilful child, her mind Is not prepared to drink so strong a wine. She plays with fire and finds it beautiful. She dallies with excitement and romance. Tis not of such a child that wives are made: For such intoxication cannot last. But fades away in silence through the years. The paths of life are stony, and the fruit Which looks so sweet is bitter to the taste. The work of youth is empty of reward. And disillusion dogs the feet of age. Is then the one companion that you choose. One who is strong to help you in the hour When you shall need her most?—whose virtue rests In gentle ways and calm serenity-A tender mother and a stedfast friend? The world would be less happy than it is Were men to always marry what they love.

PRINCR.

Within a world of shadows and of dreams, What can we know of others or ourselves? We gaze within a clouded glass and see Some fragment of another's soul pass by, And this we love or hate, and fondly dream That we can understand and then possess A great mysterious personality, Which God Himself finds difficult to judge.

Yet, in the girl whose love has filled my life, I find a strange affinity: she loves What I find lovable and sweet: she hates What I dislike: her thoughts and feelings move Along the lines of sympathy with mine: The tears that linger gently in her eyes, The tinkling laughter flowing on her mouth Find a responding echo in my heart. She is a child, yet old enough to feel The birth of love that trembles in her soul: And down below the pleasure in her eyes. There dwells the sad and serious tragedy Of life's uneven and uncertain path. Yes, she is brave and true—the qualities Most perfect in a woman; and our lives Were set when we were born beneath the rays Of one sweet star that joins us for all time.

KING.

A child, a beautiful and young-eyed child: A baby cast from its fond mother's arms Upon the bitter waves of life's unrest: What can she know of such a sin as love?

PRINCE.

Is love a sin? Can that be wrong which brings No hurt or sorrow to the world at large, And utter happiness to those who love?

KING.

Yes, love is sin and bears its punishment: It is a fruit that's rotten at the core;

It is a rose whose perfume is a snare; Like Circe's face, its beauty can decoy The wise, the brave, the rulers of mankind To seek the promise of fore-doomed delight: The sin of love is that it dares to die.

PRINCE.

Its virtue is that it has tried to live
Amid the ceaseless turmoil of the world;
That 'mid the struggle for existence still
Love rests a force, a power within the land:
That, 'mid the doubt which overturned the gods,
Love still within his temple proudly dwells;—
And still renews, undaunted, unafraid,
His golden dream within the heart of youth.

KING.

Why will you blind your reason with romance? Why, like a poet's dream of happiness, Do you surround your mind with idle words, And prate of love, as if in modern times So wild a fantasy could count among The work and worry of a busy life? You are a prince—your wife will be a queen: It is your duty to select a girl To fill her place with honour and respect: No hoyden mad with thoughtless ecstasy, No saint whose virtue hurts her in delight, Can be the idol of a people's heart; But just a lady whom the smile of doubt, The whisper of suspicion cannot reach;

Whose chosen words adorn her dignity; Whose deeds denote her breeding and her stamp:— A great princess who is to be a queen.

PRINCE.

Because this age refuses to admit
The beauty of the world, the charm of love;
Because it makes an idol of itself
And dreams of gold that's made or to be made;
Shall I forget the birthright of my mind?
Shall I, who know the secret that is lost,
Who scorn the veil that's woven o'er delight,
Turn of my own free will from beauty's side,
Because I fear the verdict of the blind?
I choose, and they shall ratify my choice,
Against the principle they serve and fear,
Because I choose the fairest and the best.

KING.

Sometimes the fairest and the best are not The wisest and the fittest to uphold The dignity which we would have them fill. You would not send an angel from the skies To do some foolish necessary toil:

And still however much we may desire,
We cannot choose the fairest and the best:
For why am I a king?—there must exist
Far better men, far nobler men than I,
Who could with high ability surpass
My feebler mind, my half capacity:
But other laws control us and our lives:

The fabric of society is built
On birth, on education, and on all
The staid tradition of a thousand years:
And so the world must heavily resent
The sin which breaks a web so intricate;
For let a single thread be snapt in twain
And all is lost and vanishes in air:
For who so sure of what he holds the truth
But just a doubt can leave him destitute.

PRINCE.

And yet humanity is marching on
To better thoughts, to happier lives, across
The body of enthusiastic youth:
Shall I not give my kingdom for a dream,
My life for just a hope of better times?
Shall I not suffer that the world may learn
The charm and beauty of awakened truth?

KING.

Yet what is truth? Her mystic face is veiled;
And, though the wise, the good, the brave have sought
To find her since the very dawn of time,
She still remains a shadow and a dream.
Why should you dare to think that you were born
To take the burden of a hero's part?
What prompts you to believe that you are great?
What marks you from the common herd of men?
'Tis often braver to be common-place:—
To lead a dull and ordinary life.
More good is done by gentle, humble lives—

By tender thoughts and honest, manly deeds,
Than by the wildest madmen that have sung
Their own desires disguised as liberty.
For see, you wish to die for abstract truth,
Yet when we ask a smaller sacrifice,
You are not even willing to forego
The love which fills a corner of your heart,
Because you fear that weakling heart will break.

PRINCE.

The sacrifice you ask is worse than death:
Though men will die with pleasure for the truth,
It must be that which they believe themselves:
For what they feel, not what they ought to feel,
Are men prepared to sacrifice their souls:
My truth, the thing that I believe and feel,
Is love—and all my life, my hope of life,
My mind, my heart, are centred in that truth.

KING.

Your truth is folly, as the wise must know.

PRINCE.

The wise must prove their wisdom, or the fool Will find his folly pleasant in despite:
How can you prove the little girl I love
Would not fulfil the duty of a queen?
How can you prove her manners and her mind
To be uncultured, and her perfect heart
Unfaithful, or unworthy to be loved?
You cannot—for you know whatever test

The scruples of convention could submit; Whatever doubt the critic eyes of men Could ever raise, one single word from her In all the radiance of her youthful charm, Would soon dispel for ever and at once. Let sleek philosophy and wisdem go, She stands before you proud and unnehamed, What can you find that is not beautiful?

KING.

I cannot turn the true into the false: Your faith has left me nothing I can say: I tried to use my knowledge as a blind,— To move you by the force of argument: But I have failed, and all is lost indeed: The girl you love is young and beautiful, And all the virtues nestle in her heart. How can I hide the anguish in my soul? Where can I turn for solace in despair? What can I say to move a stone to tears? For I have failed, and sorrow is at hand: Ah. I have loved you, since you were a child: And I have watched your splendid youth grow up To prime of perfect manhood, you have been The pride and promise of my failing years: O do not break the haven of your home: Do not destroy the hopes of anxious hours: Believe just once that all is for the best, And that I would not ask your heart to make A sacrifice so wanton and absurd. Unless I had a reason to suffice.

This little girl is gentle, and her heart
Is tender as the breeze of summer air;
Yet, perfect as she is, she ne'er can be
The wife you have desired to make of her.
This thing must pass away: you must forget
She ever crossed the pathway of your youth:
Forget—and ask no questions, for, alas,
The reason that I have I dare not name—
A reason all sufficing and complete.

PRINCE.

Why do you move me to betray my love. By this appeal to all the golden past? I cannot sound the meaning of your thought: I cannot act thus blindly in the dark. What is the reason that you dare not name? What can it be but some dishonour done. By her or me, that each of us must know, And prove it false to all the doubting world.

KING.

Both you and she are free from any blot Dishonour's hand could print upon your hearts.

PRINCE.

Then why should we, all guiltless, have to pay The debt that others owe?

KING.

Ah, why indeed?

. . .

PRINCE.

Since we are not to blame, then let us take Our pleasure where we find it—and the rest Can find their own salvation as they may.

KING.

Are there no others that you love, my child?

PRINCE.

None save her,—and you, my father, from of old.

KING.

Do you obey the people that you love?

PRINCE.

Yes, whensoe'er my honour will permit.

KING.

Then I command you as you love me now, That from this hour you never see again The girl you love, and for no other cause But that your father wills it to be so.

PRINCE.

Alas, too late, and I must disobey
Where yesterday obedience was a joy:—
For then you held the fortress of my life,
But now 'tis all divided in itself:—
And she, that little enemy with hands
Too tender for the savage arts of war
Has stolen secretly at dead of night
My troubled heart, and hidden it away.

KING.

My bolt is shot: there is no other road: The truth like murder finds the light of day: The hour I dreaded, like a two-edged sword. Hangs o'er my aged and defenceless head: Ye gods, have I deserved so hard a doom? And were the errors of my youth so great That they have reaped so wide a punishment? I seemed but like the others in delight Of happy hours and guileless liberty: Half wild like them, my sins were strong and young, Yet am I singled out to hear the pain.-I who have tried through many weary years To do my duty nobly in the world; To make the lives that dwell around my path As happy and as gentle as I could: Yet I could bear my misery with ease; In silence would my own heart burn away But that, with all the temple of my life, There falls the idol of my children's dreams:-And in the ashes of your love for me, Your own dead heart in agony must lie. The sins and sorrows of the fathers fall Upon their youthful children's guiltless heads: The cruel laws which bind the universe Oppress and kill the good and bad alike. The fault is mine-I know it and confess: And yet what solace clings about a word? I do not ask you to forgive my fault,-Yet, whether you forgive or no, alas, It will not mend the wound within your heart.

How can I bear the sorrow of this hour?
How can I speak so gently that the words
Will seem less cruel to your breaking heart?
My child, the little girl that you have lowed,
She is the daughter of my wanton youth.

PRINCE.

I hear your fatal words and yet my mind-Fails to believe or grasp the thing they mean: Say that it is not true: O speak again; Say that you did but jest, or that you used This weapon but to turn my loyal love: O say it is not true, or I believe. My heart will break with grief and agony. Yes, it is true—this thing is true—is true; Let me repeat the word until I drive The dagger deep into my breaking heart. My life—a life so full of beauty and of love. So full of hope for future happiness-Is over, finished, dead, within an hour. My youth was wild and reckless, and my days Were overburdened by a famished heart; My mind was twisted by my eager thought. To mocking doubt and cynical despair: Then came her graceful charm upon my soul, And day by day beneath her gentle smile I built the perfect edifice of love: And now the scornful breath of fate destroys: With one fell blow my castle in the air. The thing that I so passionately loved That it became myself—my very soul,

Has broken in my hands and disappeared. As though 't had never been. O where, O where Is there an outlet to the twisting maze? Where can I soothe the sorrow in my heart. And drown my love in sweet forgetfulness? I loved her-yes. I loved her with a strength, A faith that I could hardly understand: I loved her, ah, so very, very much. And was my love then guilty?—was it sin That held me spell-bound to her laughing eyes? Ah no, our love was real and sincere: It was no fraud, no warp within the mind: Her love for me was pure and innocent, And mine to her was faithful to the end. Our love was bound in perfect chastity: Yet what of that?--'tis dead as if a crime Had been the reason that it came to birth. Ah, why should Fate, which lured me into sleep. Provide so sad an ending to my dream? Why should my lot be so unfortunate? I was indeed created to unrest. And bred in sorrow and in bitterness. You ask me to forgive you?-ah, alas! Forgiveness brings no solace to despair: I can forgive: what is there to forgive? You but fulfilled your duty in the scheme, The hideous jest that fortune has designed Through many years to fall upon my head. The universe will laugh; its iron laws Find fresh delight in subtler cruelty. O God, to find a hope, a little hope—

My burden would be easier to bear:
Cannot I too defy the lightning flash
And scorn the thunder of the angry gods?
Ah no, I stand all bound upon a rock,
And none can save me from the clutch of Fate.
Yet, though I do not dare to keep alive
The burning passion in my inmost soul,
Nor e'er to touch the lips I used to kiss,
I swear that still I love her as of old;
I swear that still my breaking heart is hers;
And that the hand of death, or God Himself
Cannot destroy the glory of our love.

CURTAIN.

ACT V.

A ROOM IN A COUNTRY HOUSE.

LADY EDITH discovered.

RDITH.

Fate, like a guardian angel of the damned. Hangs like a columned cloud across my life: My childhood's dreams were all unfortunate: The flowers I plucked drooped at my touch to death; The things I loved ne'er loved me in return: For I was born beneath an evil star. Predestined to divine unhappiness: And now, when chance has placed upon my way The thing that most of all my soul desired-When I, the child of persecution, held The chalice of pure love within my hands-The old presentiment of evil falls Across my heart and forces me to feel That I shall never drink it to the dregs. What means the curious message of the Prince? What purport hides beneath its simple lines? Why has he called me at the dead of night. To meet him thus?—to leave the city streets, And seek him in this old deserted house. Half lost in pine-woods and concealed among The narrow twisting of a country lane?

No footsteps echo in these halls; no voice Illuminates the noiseless mystery: I am alone: there is no soul at hand To whisper comfortable words in ears That strain so wildly at imagined sounds:-Save he. who brought me hither through the night, The old and trusted servant of the Prince. And is this then the chamber of a bride-So freshly decked, so lavishly arrayed? A hundred lights are glimmering on the walls, And all the air is heavy with the scent Who can be Of roses and of lilies. The wife whose bed is canopied with flowers? What marriage am I called to celebrate? What means it all? What fantasy is this? Why thus intrigue so secretly, and make His movements so mysterious and dark? I like it not: I fear within my heart: I tremble for misfortune and unrest: I hear the voice of sorrow in the trees. And shadows whisper in these ancient rooms Of all the tragedy of human life. Why comes he not? Why should he tarry now? Why make suspense too difficult to bear? For I was brave to meet the blow of grief: I could have proudly held my head on high, And not have wept to see the setting sun: But now the darker hours of weakness rest Their weight upon my head in loneliness. Come, for I know the dagger in your hand Is poisoned with the message of farewell:

Come, for I know that it is here we part:—
I feel it in my soul, I know it true,
And this delay prolongs the misery.

Enter the PRINCE.

Ah, you have come—dear bearer of ill news:
And yet, although your words may break my heart,
Your coming has a still unchanging charm.
Come close, and whisper gently in my ears
The deadly words that linger on your lips.

PRINCE.

Unfair the fate that forces us to love
The very thing we never can possess.

BDITH.

Unfair the fate which forces us to part:
Yet let us never dare to curse the chance
Which brought our lips together in the dark:
And, if we needs must part, then let it be
In all the glory of romantic youth;
And let the passion that's untaught to die
Be with us to the last, a memory
Of kisses gentle as the summer dew,
Of love's still sweet yet ever-changing dream.

PRINCE.

Speak not of kisses, trifle not with dreams:

Forget the stelen moments of the past:

Forget all things that you have ever thought:

Forget the very day I crossed your path:

Behold, the slate is clean: there's nought remains,

Except the debris of a broken life. We are not here, nor have we ever been: This is no parting—for the words themselves That bid farewell are tender to the heart: And we have never loved, because indeed It is a thought we dare not entertain.

RDITH.

What have they told you that you treat me thus?

PRINCE.

If they had told me that your breast contained A vampire's heart to suck the blood of men, If they had proved you worthless or untrue, I could have found forgiveness in my heart: But these are nothing—and the truth remains. Ah, in the glory of his own delight How easily the egoist forgets That youth once taught his father to adore The hope of love—the magic in a girl: So pure the image of my own romance I had forgot the madness that can drive Two hearts to seek the pleasure of a sin: Since all my life I could not but admire The noble winter of my father's age,-Could I, who gazed upon the fruit of time, Remember that the blossom of the spring Contains a perfume dangerous and sweet? How bitter is the hour of punishment: How bitter are the words which break our love:-My child, you are the daughter of the King.

EDITH.

What have I done? O Heaven, pity me.

PRINCE.

Weep not, my sister—useless are your tears. Be brave as you were ever wont to be: Be brave and face the bitterness of truth.

EDITH.

I can be brave to win and to achieve:
I can be brave with hope to urge me on:
But ah, I see no promise but despair:
What can we do but die?

PRINCE.

Ah what indeed? I too have found the future but a blank: I see the weary years wind far away Across the unillumined plains of time, With no oasis of reward and rest: When all that makes life pleasant must depart, What is there left to make it bearable? The persecution of the men we hate: The irritation of the men we scorn: The petty worries of the dreary days Which have no goal, no reason and no end. How can we turn again to common-place, We, who have tasted of the wine of life, Whose natures crave for higher, better things. Who feel the passion stirring in our veins? Just as a sick child at the window stands With jealous eyes, all tearful to behold

Her younger sisters playing in the sun;—
Just as a lark confined within the cage
Resents the freedom in his brother's song,
Within the distant azure of the skies;—
So we shall pine for happiness—for all
We have enjoyed and can enjoy no more.

EDITH.

I cannot face the misery and pain Of such a poisoned life: I cannot face The difference which makes to-day, alas, The mockery of happy yesterday. How can I love you as a sister should? For though my lips be silent, how indeed Can I forget you were my lover too? My heart will beat as it were ever wont. Whene'er I hear the echo of your step: My face will flush with pleasure as you speak: My eyes will brighten when they meet with yours. How can I play the farce, and make believe That nothing ever was, or might have been? How can we stand together side by side, And make no sign that we have ever loved? How can we hide the passion in our hearts?

PRINCE.

So have I thought and wondered to myself
Through all the maddening moments, since I heard
The fatal words that brought me to despair.
No, there is no solution—no escape—
For we have loved too strongly to forget.

EDITH.

Yes, we are helpless in the hands of Fate—For hearts too deeply wounded cannot heal.

PRINCE.

There is a way, which I have dared to think, But scarce to speak of, dearest, for I feel It is not fair to ask so much of you.

EDITH.

What is the way? Ah, tell me, for you know There is no deed which I would shrink to do.

PRINCE.

Is it so dangerous a thing to die?—

EDITH.

Death; yes, death—that is the only way. I see your purpose ere it is expressed.

Why should we hesitate? Why should we fear? I welcome death to-night, a friend in need.

Why should I dread so beautiful an end?

'Tis better far to die with those you love,

Than live apart, alone and desolate.

PRINCE.

You are the bravest creature in the world: Ah, can you wonder that I love you, dear? Your great proud spirit soars above the earth, Your moods are all titanic and divine. Do you not fear the agony of death?

Do you not tremble at the unknown path? Where is the weakness of your woman's soul?

EDITH.

I am a thoughtless child, whose only fear Is to be left alone and comfortless. The dark contains no terror or dismay, If I can feel the pressure of your hand: The only reason that my heart is brave Is that I feel your presence at my side.

PRINCE.

Ah, I am proud to die—and I shall take
The poison in my hands with gratitude:
For many men might live a thousand years
Yet never gain the prize of such a love:
But since within the spring-time of my life
The perfect flower has blossomed at my side,
What else have I to live for or desire?

EDITH.

I see the garden of my span of life
Spread in the sunshine of undying youth:
I see its beauty and its gay delight:
I smell the fragrant perfume of the rose,
And all the radiant flowers that glorify
Its shady paths, its cloistered purity:
I see the shadow of the man I love
Across the silent meadows of the years.
The cold grey touch of age shall never dim
The sweet and tender memory of youth:—

For now, when all is perfect and the breath Of summer winds is powerless to destroy, I leave the precinct with a quiet mind, And shut the gate on earthly happiness.

PRINCE.

See where the roses and the lilies wait
To crown the sanctity of both our lives:
See where the peerless beauty of romance
Attains the goal of happiness complete:
Here is the bridal chamber we have sought:—
Divine betrothal of devoted hearts:
Here is the sacred unity of love:—
And death shall join us in a bond to-night
No chance of time can lessen or destroy.

EDITH.

Come, for the dawn is breaking in the east: Come—for you are my lover as of old— And let us drink to love that cannot die.

PRINCE

Yes, drink, for death is longing to caress
The lips which know the passion of a kiss:
Drink, child, the cup that sorrow has decreed
Shall kill the maiden pathway of your youth:
Drink, as a pledge of love—for love it is:
For love we lived, for hope of love we die.

BDITH.

I feel the poison working in my veins.

PRINCE.

Come, let me lift you in my arms, my child: Upon a bed of roses you shall lie:— Let Death itself be garlanded with flowers.

RDITH.

Drink, love, and stoop to kiss me e'er I die: Ah, hold me in your arms again—forget All else but love—my lover and my love.

PRINCE.

Cling close—for I can never let you go: Reach up your lips—entangle them with mine: So death can seal the tragedy of love.

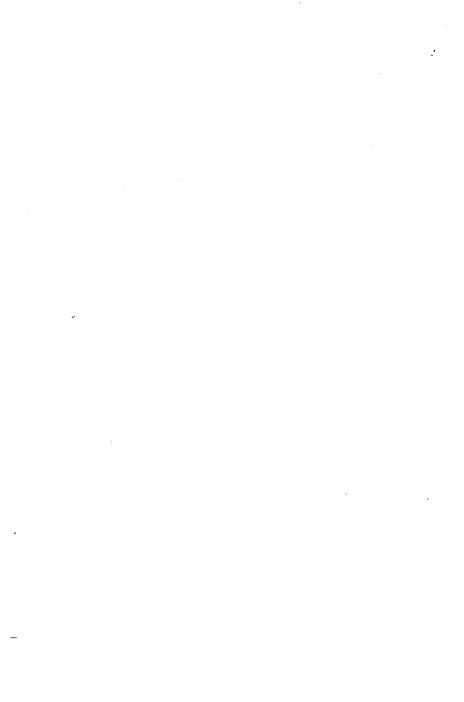
Both die.

CURTAIN.

THE END.

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